



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 149

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2003

No. 51

House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ADERHOLT).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 31, 2003.

I hereby appoint the Honorable ROBERT B. ADERHOLT to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 7, 2003, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

COCKFIGHTING

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on an issue that I have addressed in this Chamber on a number of occasions, cockfighting. But today I am here not to reiterate the case against this despicable and barbaric practice but to draw attention to a gross misuse of tax dollars of hardworking Americans whose funds are being quietly handed off by the Department of Agriculture to illegal cockfighters.

In October, the Federal Government learned of an outbreak in southern

California of Exotic Newcastle Disease which does not appear to threaten people but which is deadly to birds. Though not yet identified for certain, it appears that illegal cockfighters are responsible. Fighting roosters from Mexico, where there has been an outbreak of Exotic Newcastle, have moved illegally into California. The imprint of the disease in Mexico is nearly identical to the imprint of the disease now spreading throughout the American Southwest.

Since the outbreak occurred 6 months ago in the United States, the disease has spread rapidly. First discovered in Los Angeles County, it has spread throughout southern California and into Arizona and Nevada. There are now eight affected counties in California, and experts predict that more counties will soon be hit as the disease marches north. All movements of live birds have been halted in the quarantine area and all poultry shows have been canceled throughout the entire State. In an effort to contain the disease, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and State agriculture departments have ordered many bird flocks depopulated if any bird in a flock has been diagnosed with the infection. State and Federal authorities have killed more than 3.2 million birds, including pet birds, poultry and egg-laying hens from commercial flocks, fighting roosters and other birds. Thus far, Federal authorities have spent \$65 million and cost estimates may climb to \$250 to \$500 million before the disease runs its course. The last time there was a major outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease in California, it cost taxpayers and agriculture an immense impact.

During the course of the containment exercise, agricultural officials have been staggered by the scope of the illegal cockfighting operations they have stumbled upon. There are some observers who say that there are 50,000 game-

cock operations in southern California alone. USDA officials, according to news sources, have said that fully one-third of the flocks that they have depopulated are gamecock operations. Under California law, it is illegal to possess birds for fighting purposes. But the USDA is providing millions in compensation to illegal cockfighters whose birds have been ordered killed. According to the Bakersfield Californian and other newspapers, some individuals are being paid up to \$1,800 per fighting rooster.

Mr. Speaker, this is a scandal, a gross and irresponsible use of tax dollars. Our Federal Government is paying top-dollar black-market prices for live contraband. If there was an outbreak of plant disease, would we be compensating marijuana growers for the destruction of their crops? Let me repeat, under State law it is illegal to possess birds for fighting. Under the provisions of an amendment I sponsored last year with the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. TANCREDI), it will soon be illegal under Federal law to move any fighting birds to or from any State or territory in the United States. In short, there is no legitimate reason for individuals to possess birds for fighting purposes. But they are being remunerated. These people are organized criminals and we should not be squandering the tax dollars of hardworking Americans by making compensation payments to them. These people should not be paid off. They should be prosecuted under State and Federal law.

It is indeed ironic that the Federal Government is paying cockfighters more than it is paying pet owners, poultry growers, and other individuals who legitimately possess birds in southern California. At a time when we are making so many difficult choices with Federal expenditures, when we have a war to pay for, when we have a soaring deficit, when we are not funding critical environmental programs in

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

H2475